

Grand Opening of Computer Laboratory and Open House at Old Chilhowie High School Community Center (October 22, 2005)

Chilhowie, Virginia

I am pleased to return to Chilhowie this morning to celebrate the grand opening of the new computer laboratory here at the old Chilhowie High School and to recognize the outstanding work of the members of the Old Chilhowie High School Renovation, Inc. in preserving and transforming this building into a facility to benefit the entire Chilhowie community.

The establishment of the new computer lab was made possible by a federal grant supplied from the Appalachian Regional Commission at my request, and its opening marks the successful completion of the next step in the development of the Old Chilhowie High School Community Center.

The project to establish the community center began several years ago when a group of residents formed Old Chilhowie High School Renovation, Inc. With the goal of preserving the historic school building and at the same time providing a useful facility which would benefit the community, the group launched an effort to transform the old Chilhowie High School. Their hard work paid off, as is evident by our surroundings today.

Using funding provided by the Virginia Tobacco Commission, an impressive amount of work has been completed at the community center since renovations began in 2000. In 2003, the building opened with a local branch of the Smyth-Bland Regional Public Library. Since that time, one of the classrooms has been renovated into a museum to showcase and commemorate the history of the high school.

With today's celebration, the Old Chilhowie High School Community Center will also be home to a computer lab and public Internet access site for the Town of Chilhowie. Using \$43,579 in federal grant funds from the ARC, one of the school's eight classrooms has been renovated and equipped with 19 Windows-based computer workstations. The lab is also equipped with a network printer, an overhead video projection system, along with the office furniture required for the laboratory. In addition to the federal funds which were used, the Town of Chilhowie provided a local match totaling \$10,895 for the development of the computer lab.

Another of the classrooms in the high school is currently being transformed into a distance learning center which will be used in conjunction with the computer lab by Virginia Highlands Community College for a variety of educational and training courses. Virginia Highlands is already offering training courses at the community center through its Center for Business and Industry. Following the installation of the necessary technology, the new distance learning center will enable the community college to expand its course offerings.

Future elements for the development of the Old Chilhowie High School Community Center include the renovation of the three remaining classrooms in the high school. One of the classrooms will become a kitchen ,and the other two will be renovated into community meeting space.

I would like to take the opportunity of these remarks to recognize several individuals who have been instrumental in the successful development of the Old Chilhowie High School Community Center.

First, I would like to recognize Jim Bonham III, Chairman of the Board of Directors for Old Chilhowie High School Renovation, Inc., the other members of the Board, Brenda Umbarger and Pat Hatfield with the Smyth-Bland Regional Library, for their commitment to the development of the community center and their excellent work in establishing the computer lab which opens today and the Chilhowie branch of the Smyth-Bland Regional Library.

I would like to thank Chilhowie Mayor Gary Heninger and the members of the Chilhowie Town Council for the support they have provided to this worthy project.

I also want to thank Anne Pope, Federal Co-Chair of the Appalachian Regional Commission, for the financial assistance which was provided by the ARC for the development of the computer lab.

Dr. Dave Wilkin, President of Virginia Highlands Community College and his staff also deserve our recognition this morning. Virginia Highlands is providing a tremendous service to Chilhowie residents by offering educational and training courses here at the Old Chilhowie High School Community Center. I thank them for those efforts.

The new computer lab and public Internet access site at the Old Chilhowie High School Community Center which is now open will be of tremendous benefit to the residents of this community through the provision of new educational opportunities and free public Internet access in a convenient location. I congratulate everyone here for these accomplishments.